

DEVELOPING THE ENVIRONMENT: PROBLEMS AND MANAGEMENT by C. J. Barrow, Longman, Harlow, 1995. No. of pages: xii + 313. Price: £19.99. ISBN 0-582-08700-7.

This text sets out to present a comprehensive overview of global environmental problems, past, present and future, and to suggest ways in which these problems may be avoided or mitigated. The book opens with a series of review chapters covering, in succession, concepts of development and environment; structure, function and management of the environment; 'the state of the Earth' (covering the major components of the global system reckoned to be 'in crisis'); and environmental stability and sustainable development. Specific environmental problems are then considered in turn: climate change; desertification and soil degradation; degradation of vegetation; problems associated with agriculture, river development and urbanization. The text concludes with chapters on the 'greening' of the environment and a plea for a new approach to managing the environment.

The text therefore covers a wide thematic and geographic range. This is at once a strength and a weakness. The strength lies in the clear and well-argued overview which can be obtained by the student on the topics covered; the weakness perhaps lies in the depth of treatment, which has had to be sacrificed here and there in order to cover the author's agenda in a book of manageable length. It is clearly impossible fully to do justice to topics such as desertification in 30 or so pages; and the geomorphologist will note the limitations of trying to be comprehensive through, for example, the one-page

summary of erosion (though this particular summary is appropriate in itself for the generalist).

The author argues throughout that many environmental problems are due more to unsound ethics or concepts of development than to natural causes. This is an eminently sensible stance, though one which is perhaps ambitious to attempt to develop over such a wide range of topics, where a correspondingly wide range of factors has been involved in the historical development and current status of environmental degradation. Having said this, there is no doubt that this book will be of value to a wide range of students of environmental science, geography and development studies. It will be particularly appropriate for the undergraduate wanting at once a general introduction to many of Earth's environmental pressure points, a concise summary of the issues involved, a wealth of information, and extensive source references for further reading. The author has succeeded in presenting a valuable overview of the current state of management of the natural environment, at the global scale, and has successfully pointed to causality in a range of cases. The way forward is less clear, however, though the framework set out by Barrow in his concluding chapter provides an appropriate agenda for a more sustainable future.

DUNCAN MCGREGOR
Department of Geography
Royal Holloway, University of London
Egham Hill
Egham, TW20 0EX
UK